

The Real Son

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0:00] Well, people who were born, now I've got to be careful here, but roughly kind of after 1970 or so, have grown up with technology, haven't they?

With a certain amount of technology. And right from kids, people have learned how to use technology, phones, computers, things like that. And because of that, they often find it quite annoying when their parents keep asking them for help to do seemingly the simplest things with computers or phones.

You know what I'm talking about? You know, the child becomes the 24-hour IT help desk. And I wonder if you are that child, maybe you're that parent. Well, if you're one of those children, here's some advice that I came across that I think is worth taking on board.

When you get annoyed by parents asking tech advice, remember something. These were the people who taught you how to use a toilet. Just help them.

And I think that's a very good point, isn't it? And it highlights something about us. It highlights something about humans, all of us, whether or not our parent asks us for tech advice.

[1:11] And the thing that's true of all of us, which that brings out, is that we don't tend to appreciate so much of what our parents did for us, do we? When we were children.

In fact, it was only when I became a parent that I really started appreciating my parents properly. Because I realized so much of what they did for me. But even then, so much of what our parents did for us, we just don't remember.

And so we typically don't appreciate them nearly as much as we should. That's probably why God made it one of the Ten Commandments, to honor your mother and your father. Because we don't naturally do that like we should.

But now think about this. If that's the case with our parents, that we fail to appreciate what they've done for us, how much more is it the case with our Creator?

Think about it. I mean, think of what God has done for us, right? He's given us life. He's given us everything we have. Even now as we sit here, He causes our hearts to beat.

[2:14] Every heartbeat has been given to you by God. He gives you the lung of air that you've just breathed in that's keeping you alive. He gives us this world.

He gives us rains and crops to feed us. Your food doesn't come from pick and pay. They're a distributor. Your food comes from God. If God decided to stop the rains and stop the crops, then pick and pay wouldn't have anything to give you.

And yet, how much do we appreciate Him? How much do we appreciate daily what He does for us and what He's given us and all that He's done for us in history? Or, like with our parents, do we tend to forget so much of what God's done for us?

Because that's the kind of image that God is using here in Hosea to describe His relationship with His people. He uses this image of a parent with an ungrateful child.

Have a look. Let's read what He says from verse 1 in Hosea chapter 11. And now remember, this is God speaking. This is not primarily the prophet Hosea is speaking.

- [3 : 20] It is God speaking through Him. And I want you to listen carefully to this because this passage is really a window into God's very heart. It's full of feeling.
- Listen to what He says. It says, So you see here, God, the Creator, is describing just what He has done for the nation of Israel in history.
- Right from when they were born, before they were even a nation. This nation that He chose and created from nothing. And He chose out of the world to be His own, to know Him and to represent Him to the nations.
- That's the amazing thing about the history of Israel. Is that in the Old Testament, Israel were God's chosen people. That He decided to choose a nation so that He could use and speak through that nation to reach the world.
- What's striking here is that God doesn't just consider Israel a nation. Notice that? He doesn't just consider Israel a country or a race. But if you look at the language, He considers these people His very own child.
- [4 : 53] His child. That's how He talks about the nation of Israel. A child who, firstly, He's protected. Look at verse 1. Verse, Out of Egypt I called my son.
- Now, that's referring to the Exodus that we read about in the book of Exodus. The Exodus from Egypt when God rescued Israel from slavery. And He protected them. And He fought for them. And He kept them safe from their enemies.
- Because He was their child. It's also a child who He's guided. Have a look at verse 3. I taught Ephraim to walk. Verse 4. I led them. You know, this refers to how God guided His people.
- He spoke through the law and through the prophets. Unlike He did to any other nation on earth. And He did it to help His people live in the way that's best for them. Because they were His child.
- And then a child for whom He's provided. Look at verse 4. He says, I bent down to feed them. Now, you know what that refers to? It refers to God's miraculous feeding of His people as they wandered through the wilderness.
- [5 : 54] With manna and quail. He provided miraculously for their needs as they walked through the desert. And they couldn't provide for themselves. You see, God acted towards Israel unlike any other nation on earth.
- Effectively, He adopted them as His own child. And He did really all a loving parent would do for a deeply loved child. The heart of God is the heart of a passionate father, isn't it?
- These are the things that a passionate father makes sure they do for their children. But I want you to see how His people responded. See, all of that love and that care and that protection and that guidance.
- How did they respond? Well, look at verse 2. The more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.
- Now, the Baals were idols. The more they were called, the more they were called, the more they would have said, they were called, the more they were called. They bowed before they worshipped.
- [7 : 00] And they directed their trust and their affection towards these gods of their own making rather than their true God who did all this for them. Now, why would they do that?
- Well, it's because they looked to these idols for things that they should have been looking to God for. Protection and guidance and provision. And so eventually they loved these idols more than God.

And they thought about and directed their energies towards these idols more than they did to God. God kind of disappeared from the picture for them. Now, in our modern world, whenever we read about idols, balls, things like that, we think, oh, they were so silly, weren't they?

I mean, who would worship something that they've made? You know, why would they trust in these statues, things that they constructed, rather than God? I mean, how dumb can you get?

You know, our modern mindset, we look down on people of the past and we go, oh, they were so uneducated, so unenlightened. And yet, isn't that exactly what we do? You know, we might not make idols out of gold or silver, but ask yourself, what do you trust in life?

[8 : 07] What do you look to for those three things? Protection. What do you look to for protection? Do you look to combat force?

Armed response? Is that what you trust primarily for your protection? Maybe your alarm system? Or maybe your burglar bars? Or do you look to God? Ask yourself, what do you look to for guidance in life?

The internet? Whenever you want to know something, whenever you're lost, do you look what other people have written on blogs, maybe? Or maybe you listen to radio talk shows, because they have guidance.

They will tell you how to live. Or Oprah. Or religious leaders, even. Oh, the pastor. And I'm sure the pastor will guide me. He's wise. I don't know if you could say that about this one.

But do you look to religious leaders for guidance? Or do you look to God? You know, it's pretty easy to answer that question, because you just have to look at how often you open the Bible and read it in your life.

[9 : 09] Because that will really tell where you're primarily looking to for guidance. What about provision? What do you rely on to put food on the table? The money in your bank account?

Your career? Your pension fund? The government grant? Or God? You see, these are all man-made things that we've constructed, and we tend to trust in them more than we trust in God, don't we?

And in that way, as Adrian pointed out earlier, we are no less idolaters than the Baal worshipers in Israel. And so the next thing that God says in Hosea should really make us sit up and listen.

It should make us forget everything else that's on our minds about today and about this week. And listen to what God says here, because he goes on to say what happens to idolaters. What happens to Israelites because of their idolatry.

Listen to what he says from verse 5. So in other words, what God's saying here quite clearly is that Israel is going to be invaded again by Assyria.

[10 : 36] The sword is flashing in the town, so that's what it's talking about. They're going to be taken into captivity, and God's not going to stop that from happening. And that's exactly what happened if we look at history. And God didn't stop it.

Because if they're not going to listen to God and submit to Him, then they're going to submit to someone else. And that's God's point here. He's trying to show them, and He's trying to show us, that they will always serve someone in the end.

And if they don't want to serve God, they'll serve something else. And it's the same with us. You know, we only have two choices in life. We are either led by God, or we're led by something or someone else.

Whether it's the world around us, the culture around us, our boyfriend or girlfriend, or even if it's our own desires. You know, we're like children, really.

And that's the image that keeps on coming through here in Hosea, is that God is the Father, but we are like children. And we have all the vulnerabilities of children. We are so easily influenced.

[11 : 36] Even if we don't think we are, we are. We are very easily influenced. And you know, because children are like that, that's sadly why children are so easy to kidnap. I mean, especially young children.

You know, if their parent loses them in a shopping mall, horror of horror that that is for a parent, it's very easy for someone, for a stranger, to say, come with me and take them off.

Because they need to be led by someone. They'll follow. They'll always follow someone. And of course, that's why if we're parents or grandparents, we make like extra sure whenever we go to a public place or a shopping mall, that we keep our eyes, that they don't leave our sight.

We want to make sure that we're the ones who are leading them, not someone else. Because we know someone's going to lead them. But I want you to imagine this for a second. Imagine you are given guardianship over a child.

You're a friend, and their friend's given you their child to look after and take to the mall. Or maybe you're a parent or a grandparent, whatever it is. But you're trying to protect a child, keep them safe in a shopping mall.

[12 : 37] But they want nothing to do with you. This child just wants nothing to do with you. They don't want to be led by you. They don't want to listen to you. And they want to run off at every opportunity. Imagine how difficult that would be to keep them safe.

Well, that's exactly what God's people were doing with him, you see. But the sad fact is, if they refuse to listen to him and be guided by him and be under his authority, they would be under someone else's authority.

But someone who, unlike God, doesn't want the best for them. And that's the point God's making here. And it's the same with us. If we're not going to be led by God daily, we will be led by something else.

The culture, our desires, whatever it is, it won't be good for us. That's what God's trying to say to us this morning. He's trying to warn us, just like he was warning Israel.

And the history of Israel and what they did just illustrates the truth of this for us. They refused to be led by God, and so they became slaves again. Just like they were in Egypt, but this time in Assyria.

[13 : 40] And God let that happen, because as he says, they were determined to turn from him. And so he gave them what they wanted, basically. And that's the worst thing that God can do for you and me, to give us what we want.

Because what we want is, by and large, not what's good for us. But, there's a surprising twist in Hosea 11.

And I wonder if you've noticed the change of tone between verse 7 and 8. Because even though they abandon God, what we see is that he never fully abandons them.

Look from verse 8. We suddenly read some very emotional words from God, just out of the blue. Listen to what he says. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?

How can I treat you like Adma? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me. All my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger. You see, Adma and Zeboiim, they were towns that were completely destroyed by God.

[14 : 44] Very much like Sodom and Gomorrah. There was no trace of them. They were wiped off the face of the planet. God did that, by the way, quite a lot in the Old Testament. And he has every right to do it today.

It's just his mercy that's sparing him from wiping out towns completely. But, you see, God can't bring himself to completely destroy his people like that.

Even though they deserve it. Even though they've completely rejected and turned away from him. He can't bring himself to destroy them. Why? Well, because he's their father. And no matter how much a child has turned away and rejected their father, their father can't destroy them.

Their father can't totally reject them. Even if they absolutely deserve that. Okay, so if that's the case, why does he allow them to be invaded at all, you might ask?

Why does he allow them, if he loves them, to be taken into exile like they were? Well, as it turns out, if you look at the history of Israel, that was exactly what they needed. I know it's difficult to think they needed to be invaded and taken into exile.

[15 : 50] But they needed that because it showed them what happens when they abandon God. And so they realized how much they needed to come back to him. But in all of this, I want you to realize he didn't abandon them.

They abandoned him. But he also didn't force them to obey him. And so he had to let them experience a bit of what happens when they don't. For their good. And for ours when we read this.

Because you know what, when we read what Israel did in the Old Testament, the mistakes they made in their relationship with God, it's supposed to be a warning so we don't do the same thing. Even though this father's heart didn't want to cause his people to suffer.

They still had to go through this. I mean, think about it. What parent wants their child to suffer? What good parent wants their child to suffer? And yet, sometimes we have to give our child a hiding, don't we?

Sometimes we've got to ground them. Sometimes we've got to take away what they enjoy. Whatever discipline works for your child. And as parents, we don't want to do that.

[16 : 52] If you do want to, then you shouldn't be a parent. But we don't want to punish our children. We don't want to discipline them. And yet we know we must for their good. And God does the same with his children.

We must understand he did it then, he does it now. And he doesn't mess around. He used an Assyrian army to discipline his children. And he still uses things in life to discipline his children.

Sickness, job loss, whatever it is. But only so much as they need that. You see, he doesn't... God is not a God who mollicoddles his children.

He doesn't exist for their comfort. Let's get that straight. And so they will feel the pain of his discipline at times. But he always does it. We've got to remember this. He always does it for his children's good.

And he takes no pleasure in it. He doesn't want to do it. And so what we read in Hosea here is that there's this uncomfortable tension, isn't there, in God's heart.

[17 : 51] We read it coming out in these words. In verse 8, my heart is changed within me. Literally that says, my heart recoils within me. You know, God has a deep tension within his own heart.

On the one hand, his resolve to rescue and care for and provide for his children. But then on the other hand, their constant rebellion and turning away from him and the painful consequences of that.

You can almost feel God's frustration in these verses with his children that just keep on turning away from him. And he keeps on rescuing them and they keep on going back. You see, the problem is this pattern just keeps on repeating itself.

It's a repeating pattern. Because notice, first, Israel are slaves in Egypt. That's how they start. Then God rescues them to be his people. And then they obey him for a time.

But then after a while, they begin to turn away. Which leads them back to slavery in Assyria this time. And we know again that God intervened. If we carry on reading the Old Testament, God intervened to bring his people out of that slavery.

[18 : 54] They came back to him again for a time under Nehemiah and Ezra. And then you know what happened? Well, they drifted away again. You know, it was just this pattern, this cycle that kept on going round and round and round.

God's child that he loves just seems to keep going back to his destructive patterns over and over again. And sadly, that's how it is with us, isn't it?

I mean, examine yourself this morning. Sin is like a drug, isn't it? And like a drug, we know that it's not good for us. We know that it's bad for us.

And we resolve to turn away from it and quit. But then it doesn't take long, does it, before we're back at it again. Proverbs describes it well.

It says, like a dog who returns to its vomit. That's pretty gross. But it's true, isn't it? With regard to so many sins in our lives.

[19 : 51] We want to get rid of them and yet we're right back there. And the question is, what's going to break this destructive cycle that we see in Hosea 11?

What's going to interrupt this? What's going to solve this problem? This repeated pattern of rescue and then falling back into sin? What's going to change?

Well, Matthew has the answer for us. In Matthew chapter 2. Look at Matthew's words again. In chapter 2, the angel told Joseph to flee to Egypt.

And so he got up. He took the child and his mother during the night. And he left for Egypt where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet.

Out of Egypt I called my son. So you see Matthew, who's narrating the events of Jesus' childhood here. He sees the young Jesus journeying from Egypt back to Israel as something that's deeply symbolic.

[20 : 54] It didn't happen by chance. It was no coincidence that this whole Herod thing happened and Joseph had to go to Egypt. That was all God ordaining it to happen because he wants us to see a link between that and Hosea's prophecy.

You see, to Matthew, this, what's happening is a fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy about Israel's exodus. Because Jesus took the same journey that Israel took 1,500 years earlier.

But I want you to notice the difference. If you read up what Israel did and if you read up what Jesus did in his life. Where Israel went on to drift away from God and rebel against God, Jesus always obeyed his father.

He always followed his father's will. He always trusted his father. In other words, and we've got to get this this morning, Jesus was the son that Israel should have been.

But he's also the son who went on to break the destructive cycle that Israel had gotten themselves into by succeeding where they kept on failing.

[21 : 59] And in that way, Jesus is the true son that God's talking about. Jesus is the true Israel that Israel should have always been.

And that's what Matthew's saying here. That's what we've got to realize this morning. But what does that mean for us 2,000 years later? Well, everything.

I hope you see. Because, you know, this whole morning we've been seeing ourselves in Israel, haven't we? We've been seeing the similarity between us and the nation of Israel. Our own ungratefulness.

Our own tendency to chase after idols. Our slavery to our desires. Our destructive cycle of drifting away from God and then going back to our sin. Well, now, what Matthew's saying because of Jesus is we have a chance to escape that inevitable cycle.

You have a chance to escape that ongoing pattern of sin through Jesus. Because we no longer have to be like the old Israel were because there is a new Israel, Jesus himself, who came to do what we could not do on behalf of all those who trust in him and follow him.

[23 : 09] In other words, for those who are in Christ, everything that Jesus did, you did in God's eyes. If you have trusted in Christ. If you are in Christ.

His obedience is credited to your account. And his death is credited to pay for your sins. Everything he does counts for you. And that was deliberately to break you out of Israel's destructive pattern of sin.

And if that's you this morning, if that describes you, if you are in Jesus this morning, I don't know. You know, you come to church. I chat with you. Hopefully, I get to know you over the months.

But I don't really know in your heart whether you love Jesus, whether you trust and follow him. You do, though. And if that's you this morning, if you are truly in Jesus, then firstly, I want you to know that you are one of the people upon whom God has set his love as a loving father who deeply loves his child.

And that's why you believe, by the way. Because God has chosen to love you. He set his love upon you. And he has given you. He's opened your eyes.

[24 : 17] And he's brought you into his people through faith in Christ. And so, if that's the case, think about that. Think about the implications of that on your life. Because there is no greater truth that can change a person's life than really, really knowing in their heart of hearts that the Creator loves them passionately and deeply.

And if that is true, you can know that everything he does in your life, every single thing he does, he does out of a deep undying love for you to rescue you and to preserve you to eternal life.

Everything he does, even if it's not comfortable, it's being done by a loving father who deeply loves you, who gave himself for you. He loves you so much. And knowing that should change everything.

It should change the way you live. It should change how you think about life and how you go about your situations, knowing that the all-powerful, ruling God of the universe has set his love upon you.

It's the greatest knowledge anyone can have. And secondly, if you're in Jesus, because you're in Jesus, you're not bound to repeat the endless pattern of sin anymore because he's put his Spirit in his people, the Bible says, to give them new desires, to give them the desires of Jesus, desires to love and follow our Father, to break us away from the constant desire to go back to sin.

[25 : 41] Of course, your job is to nurture those desires now. We see that in Scripture over and over again. As Paul says, you've got to keep in step with the Spirit. And you don't keep in step with someone unless you're concentrating on them, unless you're looking at them.

Unless you're following them. You've got to be filled with the Spirit, the Bible says, daily, so that you don't keep drifting away. And you know what? When the Bible says you must be filled with the Spirit, it implies you can be emptied of the Spirit.

Or at least, as Paul says, you can quench the Spirit. And so you've got to put in disciplines into your life to be filled with the Spirit, to receive the Spirit's guidance in your life.

And you do that as you meet together with other Christians. And as you open God's Word, and as you sit under God's Word, not once a month, okay, not once every two weeks, but at least every Sunday.

As you come and you hear God's Word and you listen to Him and submit to His authority over you, but also as you meet together with other Christians during the week, as you open God's Word daily, and as you establish regular prayer in your life, that's how you keep in step with the Spirit.

[26 : 54] But, maybe that's not you. Maybe all this is just going over your head. Because maybe you haven't trusted in Jesus. Maybe you don't believe that He's your Creator, the Son of God.

Maybe you've never put your faith in Him and decided to follow Him. Well, if that's you this morning, I want you to know, with all the compassion that I can muster, I want you to know that you are a slave to something else, whether you know it or not.

You're always bound to be a slave to something, to your desires, to your idols. You can't help but be a slave to them.

Well, maybe this morning, God is calling you to become one of His people. Out of slavery to sin.

Maybe God is calling you out of those destructive patterns of life. Calling you out of Egypt, so to speak. Well, if you hear that call this morning, then don't leave this building ignoring it.

[27 : 58] It's the most unwise thing to ignore the call of God. If you're hearing that call, and He does call people as they sit under His Word, and they hear His voice, if that's you, don't leave this building without responding to Him.

So speak to me. I'd love to pray with you privately. No one else has to know. No one else has to see right now. I'd just love to pray with you, that God would work in your life, that you would respond to what you've heard.

But right now, let me pray for all of us. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Son to be the new Israel. We thank You for sending Your Son to do what Your people cannot do in their own strength.

to live for You, to listen to You, to follow You, to obey You. And we thank You most of all for sending Your Son to die for us, to take our punishment so that we can come to You.

Help us, Lord, to do that. Help us. Every single person in this church this morning, I pray that You would help them to come to You, to know You, to enter into Your people, to enter into that amazing, intimate relationship where they know beyond the shadow of a doubt that You love them.

[29 : 11] And Lord, help us to respond to this in our lives by glorifying You, by seeking what You want rather than what we want. And fill us, Lord, with the great joy of knowing You in this life and in eternity.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.